

# Buddhist Sermons 2005

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## Doubts As To What The Buddha Taught?

The world has known for quite some time, i.e. over a period of time more than two and a half millennia, as to what the Buddha taught. That was a way of good living for mankind, both for their edification and exaltation in this very life, both materially and spiritually, and for a better one in their next life after death. By the beginning of the Christian era, this message of Buddhism had not only spread both to the west and the east of Asia but had successfully taken root wherever it went. These included countries like Afghanistan and Iran in the west as well as China, Korea and Japan in the east. In the south and southeast, Buddhism also reached Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. Art and archaeology of all these

But soon after the passing away of the Master at the age of eighty, after full forty-five years of missionary activity, there were considerable numbers, even amidst those who went under the name of Buddhist disciples, who were not completely willing to abide by his teachings.

Some among them openly complained that the discipline he had laid down for the disciples who had joined his monastic community were far too rigid and irksome [*adhisallikhat'evāyaṃ Samaṇo Gotamo*].

Some others, like the monk Bhaddāli, rebelled against the widely accepted injunction about abstinence from the night meal. There were still others like Ariṭṭha, the vulture-trapper's son and Sāti, the fisherman's son who had not yet not reached sufficient maturity to understand the spirit of what the Buddha taught.

This situation is quite understandable in the light of the Master's own observation about the ability of the average worldling to understand what he preached as his dhamma [*rāgadosa-paretehi nā 'yam dhammo susambudho MN. I. = my teachings are beyond the comprehension of those plunged in depths of greed and hatred*].

For us who live today in the midst of the humdrum of the world, the philosophy seems to be as if everything around us in the world were made available to us for ceaseless consumption. The average man of the world also seems to think that all his sense organs which are strategically placed in his head are meant to be kept open and receptive all the time for the intake of seducing and enticing information the world seems to be generating through its own built in ingenuity.



## Like Unto a Sleeping Village Carried Away in a Flood

*Suttaṃ gāmaṃ mahogho'va Maccu ādāya gacchati*

We have already written and spoken about the disastrous misbehavior of

nature in the tsunami incident. Humans have wept and they shall continue to weep. As to what the heavens do, we shall not comment. And about the correctness or otherwise of what has taken place, diverse forms of defense are being submitted from many quarters. Their acceptance or rejection simply depend on two English words - credibility [of what is being said] and credulousness [of those on whose ears they fall]. It is comforting to know that in some parts of the civilized world, at least the laws of the land protect children from the brutal assaults of parents.

The extent of damage to life and property is being continually assessed globally. The dead, none of them at all, can be brought back to life. It is also being repeatedly stated, and that in terms of one's inherited beliefs, that those who have been made to perish in this disaster are unquestionably punished for crimes they have committed against some form of authority. The world is large, we maintain, and creeds of the world are diverse. Let each find his solace from wherever it could be easily obtained.

To us Buddhists, this is no more and no less than an elemental disturbance of very great magnitude. The great elements or *mahā-bhūtas* of which this universe is made, like earth, water, heat and wind, when externally located unlike when located within the human body, can exhibit great violence in action. Earth element will display its own self-power and violence through global tremors and quakes, water through tidal waves and floods, heat through volcanic eruptions and wind through typhoons and cyclones. They are always seen to be challenging and even over stepping parental authority. For in most forms of religious thinking, these elements are normally held to be powers within or under the command of a far greater power whom they place above themselves. In Buddhist thinking, Nirvana is well beyond the reach of elements.

Ancient Indians, at a time when such power was not centralised within a single source, by whatever name they chose to call it, smoothly got over this difficulty by giving each of these elements heavenly or divine positions. In other

words, they deified or made gods out of them. God of Waters or Varuṇa was made answerable for violent behaviour during tidal waves, or Maruts for violent storms in the sky above. Of course, this meant prayers and sacrifices of all sorts to supplicate them for gentle and less offensive behaviour towards humans. And man was then as happy as he wanted to be.

These elements were in fact elevated in the course of this process to the position of being guardians of the moral and cosmic order as well, as were Indra and Varuṇa [*Indrāvaruṇau*] under the name of *Ṛtasya gopau* in the Ṛgveda. These beliefs of man about the gods of his creation, of course, die hard. On the other hand, when these elements misbehaved for whatever reason man would ascribe for them, man would then invest them with still greater power for punishment, and even revenge, on evil doers on grounds of moral impropriety. But in situations like the present, we Buddhists need to be reminded that within the basic Buddhist teachings there is no room to make a moral issue of this tragedy as a heavenly or divine punishment for those who, by the judgement of the man in the street, are guilty of sin.

Such supersonic judgements and action from heaven above are categorically denied in what we would consider to be authentic Buddhist texts of classical standing. The Raṭṭhapāla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya [MN. II. 68], in its very clear statement *attāṇo loko anabhissaro* rejects, in no uncertain terms, the existence in Buddhist thinking of a supreme power or person who presides over the destiny of man. The word *anabhissaro* means no more and no less than that. Punishment for the sins of man in the popularly known sense of *vindicta mihi* or revenge is mine, leaving the power of punishment in the hands of somebody above and beyond man, is unknown in Buddhism. Paying off for sins in Buddhism, as is implied by the word *paṭisaṃvedeti*, is a self-operative process where the major religious concern is either about the individual's corrosive degradation or his transcendental self-edification.

Coming back to our tragedy of the tsunami devastation, the violence of an

angry ocean has dealt with all things both animate and inanimate with equal venom and ruthlessness. Humans were mercilessly dealt with, as we could never imagine in the hands of any person or thing associated with the divine, compelling them to receive death in the grip of elemental forces, going through immense pain of body and mind. Caught up in the ravaging waters, large boulders of rocks would have rolled along with equal ease, in the company of rooted-out massive trees, all equally destined to destruction, for no specific crime committed by them.

In this kind of situation, popular Buddhist beliefs would also incline in the direction of identifying the punishment suffered with an action which led to this result. In other words, it is a belief in a qualitative identity of a *kamma* with its consequence or *vipāka* that follows. This sounds very plausible to many, we agree. This is the way it is presented in Sri Lanka today by most of the *dhamma*-preachers, both monks and laymen. They confidently hang on to the *kamma-sarikkatā* doctrine of the Apadāna Pāli, little realising that this book, together with the Budhavamsa and the Cariyāpiṭaka of the Khuddaka Nikaya was rejected as being unacceptable by the orthodox monks of Sri Lanka, even as far back as pre-Buddhaghosa times.

According to these preachers all the ailments which the Buddha suffered during forty-five years of his life as Buddha are traceable to different single acts of *pāpa-kamma* which he is supposed to have committed in his previous existences. And this, mind you, while he was aspiring for Buddhahood under the jurisdiction [*vyākaraṇa* or *vivaraṇa*] as it were, of twenty-four previous Buddhas. It may also appear very convincing, if one or two examples without adequate verification, were presented even by modern-day writers on Buddhism.

But we have definite proof in the more authentic Buddhist texts that the Buddha rejected this *kamma* theory of identity where *vipāka* or the consequence is identical, more or less qualitatively and quantitatively, with the action or *kamma* which preceded it. In the Loṇaphalakavagga of the Anguttara Nikaya [at AN. I.

249], the Buddha is seen rejecting the assertion that ` people suffer or pay for their *kamma* in the same manner as they have committed them [*yathā yathā 'yaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathā taṃ paṭisaṃvediyatī 'ti*]. He is seen to be correcting it to read as ` suffering the consequences of their acts.' [Note the correction in the original Pali which reads as *yathā vedaniyaṃ ayaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathā 'ssa puriso vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvediyatī 'ti*]. We maintain that it needs a great deal of judgement to see the difference between these two statements.

*The tsunami disaster does and must teach the saner world a lesson for all times. Those who have suffered death on account of it are dead and are gone for ever. None of us now alive here have a right to sit in judgement over them posthumously. They have gone, carrying with them whatever judgement they deserve. We Buddhists have to accept that we have to go from here with a self-written verdict, with no need whatsoever of a jury to sit in judgement over our innocence or guilt, or the possibility of a court to appeal against the judgement.*

And further. Funeral obsequies which we now choose to perform on behalf of the dead at personal family levels or at national state level would certainly serve a cause for somebody, in some way. For some, it is an expression of deep-seated grief or appreciation. For others, it is paying an over due debt of gratitude. For yet others, it is no more than a correction of a shameless neglect or gross failure at domestic, social or even state level. As far as we know, the only stamp we can put on any dead person's passport, with a reasonable degree of honesty, has only two words in Pali. They are *yathā 'bhatam*. They just mean **as they have gathered**. No confusion whatsoever about their embarkation on the outward journey. Only two sign boards at points of entry, with the words BLISSFUL CONTINUANCE on one side and DOWNWARD TO DAMNATION on the other.

This being the real situation today, let us now sensibly return to the care of the living. In a crisis like this, there is no denying that even the uppermost on the ladder are totally shocked at what has happened. They have to feel it or they

have to be made to feel it. Then and only then will words like DISASTER AVERTING which we have seen on sign boards in our streets day after day, for several years, come to make any sense to us. As we speak today, two ideas come crashing into our heads. Tsunami or no tsunami, the word DISASTER must awaken us to the possibility of such situations in our midst, any time, any where. They are not necessarily disasters of nature alone: of floods and tidal waves, earth quakes and volcanic eruptions. Of these, both those who govern and we who are governed must be constantly alerted. Then only will the word AVERTING mean anything. Officially, dozens of very smart people need to be responsible for this, with a twenty-four hour dedication to duty while at the job. Are they there, and were they there, officially on duty?

To pick out just one out of many, think of the disasters on our high ways, disasters caused by reckless drivers, large pot-holes on the city roads, unguarded railway level-crossings, murderous container-cargo lorries on our high-ways at all times of day and night. These are all wrong-doings. Legislation must be instituted and somebody must be prosecuted and punished. Make no mistake about confusing prosecution and punishment as crimes, not even while talking about human rights. Tell me as to who must keep an eye on these items of gross neglect in order to avert disasters? Find yourself the answer and address yourself to the correct quarters. We have not only to plead. We have to pester those in authority. Or at times, even to plague the authorities concerned, if they are found nodding at their job.

Turning now our attention to the post-disaster activities undertaken by those of us still left alive. The State must of course appear in the forefront, but indeed with an unquestionable sense of unity and public welfare. Thoughts of victory or defeat at the next poll must compulsorily be dumped in the garbage bin, and if necessary along with the people who think in those terms. Public must severely censure any attempts at boosting party policies at any stage, any where, in public or in private.

Now in terms of religion itself, how should we rise to face situations like these? With a courageous non-creationist attitude in their religion, the Buddhists have been taught to look upon disasters like these as very natural events in this physical world of ours. Nothing was created by any super power, to be destroyed by him at a time he chooses to do. All world systems are subject to the law of change and impermanence - *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā* is the rule. There is no exception to it. The Buddha did not hesitate to declare that even Brahmā whom the Indians believed to be the ultimate source of power in the universe had to be, logically, subject to the law of change: *atthi brahmuno'pi aññatattaṃ*.

Erratic elemental changes bring about disasters like these. Living within such a system, we have to face them. Our physical and mental security against them depends entirely on the degree of our preparedness, also both physically and mentally, to face them. In Japan, houses built out of paper-like light material face up to the frequent earth quakes of that region with ease.

Being mentally prepared for such situations implies two things. In the first instance, one knows well and truly the perishable nature of all material things of the external world which we appropriate with an illogical sense of ownership and cling on to with a sense of inseparable partnership. Their reality is the same, whether they are animate like ourselves including our wives and children and the animals we keep like our cattle and pets and many others. We also have our inanimate possessions like our houses and property, our refrigerators and washing machines, our vehicles and our machinery and industrial equipment with which we make our living and be proud of our unique possessions. We make them all dear and near to us. They are all a source of temporary pleasure on the one hand and of a passing phases of vanity on the other.

But Buddhist teachings instruct us on these with a fore-warning. That our arrogance even about the possession of children indeed vexes us. That with no command over our own selves, it is a myth to claim command over our children. Few among us can challenge the truth of this [*puttā m'atthi dhanam atthi iti bālo*



*vihaññati attā hi attano natthi kuto puttā kuto dhanam*. Dhp. v. 62]. They tell us that one's ownership even to oneself is no more than a fiction: *attā hi attano natthi*. None of us has a command over our own self to make it stay as we wish. This is the glaring truth disclosed in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta which finally brought the first batch of the *pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū* to the threshold of Nibbāna. It is that 'buffered with this awareness of the reality of the world that one must live in its midst.' That provides the most effective shock-absorber in life. Therefore the real contemplation or *bhāvanā*, if you do any at all, has to be on the *tilakkhaṇa* or the truth of *anicca dukkha anatta* in terms of one's own self.

When the truth of this is fully comprehended as we go through in life, as my Paṭācārā [and your Kisāgotamī] did, under the guidance of the Buddha, on the death of her infant child [and believe me, no more deaths] and the monk Cakkhupāla did on losing his eye sight in his old age, saying that eyes and ears which we claim as our own [*mamāyitāni*], and our whole bodies perish on their own right,

*Cakkhūni bhijjanti mamāyitāni  
sotāni bhijjanti that'eva kāyo*

all of us will invariably reach our blissful peace in the end. With that true vision of the monk Cakkhupāla about the reality of life [delivered to us by himself] have we any need to go tracing a story of the past to find a *karmic* cause for the loss of his eye sight? We still have more to learn and be re-educated in our own dharma.



**Until a Disaster Strikes us Dead what have We been**

## Doing?

### **An honest self-scrutiny in terms of our religious beliefs**

Post-disaster speculations can be many and varied. Most of us among humans, possibly in any part of the world, do have a religion of some sort. And particularly in times of stress and strain, we do turn in the direction of religion for protection, comfort and guidance. Even on this single planet of ours, unmindful of the cosmic vastness we know of today, man appears to have felt himself helpless enough at times to be reckoned as microscopic. Religious literature of most people reflect this. Outer space, as it were, dominated us and heaven or the sky above captured for itself the position of being the divine plane of the gods. Brightness and brilliance in the sky above us, undoubtedly helped a great deal in combining the heavenly and the divine with light and luminosity.

Both the word *deva* which means a divine being and the word *svarga* [Pali *sagga*] which means the world of the divine beings are both associated with this idea of light and radiance. Thus the regions of light, located above the world of humans, came to be looked upon as the heavenly abodes or *deva-loka*. It is not surprising that today even the most orthodox religions of the world are prepared to challenge this view, that heaven is in the region of the clouds and the existence of God is there. The richness of ancient Indian mythological speculation provoked and promoted the Indian religions not only to create fabulously large hosts of heavenly beings, each group building a large community for itself, but also create infinite planes of heavenly existence, neatly stratified one above the other.

In spite of the clearly specified spirit of anthropomorphism [i.e. of laying stress on the importance man] in early Buddhist teachings, these mythological elements of the Indian religious infra-structure found their way with ease into both the religious practices and the religious literature of the Buddhists. But the Buddhists found no room for angry gods of violent behavior in their pantheon. To

the Buddhists, gods generally are products of good living and are therefore benevolent by nature. Whatever be the genesis of the heavenly worlds called *sagga*, the Buddhists maintain that it is the morally good people who also are established in the dhamma who are destined to go to heaven: *dhammatthā sīlasampannā te janā saggagāmino* [at SN. I. 33].

In the total cosmic set up, the *devās* [i.e. heavenly beings] are looked upon by the Buddhists as belonging to two strata, as celestial or of the upper regions [*ākāsaṭṭha*] and terrestrial or earthly [*bhummaṭṭha*]. The Buddhists have ingeniously integrated them into their living world, looking upon them as benefactors and care-takers of the less gifted humans [*devatānukampito poso sadā bhadrāni passati* - DN.II.88 ff.]. The humans therefore wish these gods well, infusing them as it were with vitality via the meritorious deeds they do, and expect them in return to protect them and safeguard them from danger.

*Yā tattha devatā āsum tāsam dakkhiṇam ādise  
Tā pūjitā pūjayanti mānitā mānayanti naṃ.  
Tato naṃ anukamoanti mātā puttam 'va orasṃ.  
Devatānukampito poso sadā bhadrāni passati.*

loc. cit.

During their regular religious activities, our lay people gift the devas, both *ākāsaṭṭha* and *bhummaṭṭha* with a share of the merit they acquire.

*Ākāsaṭṭhā ca bhummaṭṭhā devā nāgā mahiddhikā  
puññaṃ taṃ anumoditvā ciraṃ rakkhantu sāsanaṃ*

This is why people are suddenly awakened, as if in the middle of a deep sleep, and become extra religious during calamitous disasters. In tragic circumstances like these, people admittedly need extra hope and plentiful reassurance from some source, no matter from where, which is more than and above human. It is only in the super humans that men and women have been

continually placing their trust. Our plain and direct question is Why not a father, why not a mother and why not a benevolent ruler, if they can find one anywhere? Are we humans not capable of making our-selves adequately trustworthy?

This is where religion needs to sensibly step in, step in to genuinely offer solace to people who are lost. And who have lost, lost something or nearly everything dear to them. Please endeavor to make good their loss, even temporarily. Identify what is lost, and explain to them clearly why we reckon what has happened to be a loss. Adopt a line of reasoning which is comforting. In moments like these, people have to accept realities, or have to be made to accept them as such. Collective sharing of grief can often reduce the sting. Try to reduce isolated and personalized grieving to a minimum. Instant relief comes to people in being offered the need of the moment. Food and shelter take precedence over everything else. Health care almost needs to go hand in hand. When people are in grief, a feeling of being in the same boat can often reduce the intensity of the trauma.

There goes an ancient Indian sloka in Sanskrit which says:

*Durbhikṣe c' ānnadātāraṃ subhikṣe ca hiraṇyadaṃ  
bhaye vā 'bhayadātāraṃ svarge 'pi bahumānyate.*

Food in times of famine, and wealth  
when there's food in plenty,  
and security in times of fear.  
These bring much glory in Heaven,  
to those who to others provide them well.

Now for a little bit of personal self-scrutiny after a death-dealing disaster like the one we have been through. None of the people who were carried away by the tidal wave ever knew what was going to happen. As our Dhammapada [Dhp. v. 47] wisely puts it, they were caught unawares like a sleeping village, fast gone

to sleep, when they were swept away: *suttaṃ gāmaṃ mahogho 'va maccu ādāya gacchati*. Literally, this is what happened. They are now gone, gone away from us. We know not where. We are still here. But speaking figuratively, mind you, we ourselves are being swept away every moment, without our knowing what is happening to us.

The Dhammapada verse quoted above tells us that as we live our day to day life in the world, responding to the stimuli we get from the world, we are scatter-brained [i.e. what the Pali word *byāsatta-manasaṃ* means]. We are all the time flattered and enraptured, because we are submitting ourselves to gratify our senses. Therefore we really do not know what we do. Our responses to our sensory stimuli are not well judged, with an awareness of consequences [*anādīnavadassāvī*].

It is as though we are gathering flowers in a meadow, going at everything we see. The Dhammapada [Dhp. v. 47] puts it as *pupphāni h'eva pacinantam byāsatta-manasaṃ naram*. Our mind is set everywhere: *byāsatta-manasaṃ*. We are without a firm foot-hold anywhere. We know not where we go. The very tragic situation is that of both those who have been carried away and we know for certain are dead and those of us who have been left behind, one is not better than the other. The only difference is that those who have left this life, have their verdict already given. As Buddhists, we have to accept that they have now got a new life as befits the life they led here [*yathābhataṃ*], good or bad. As for us, left behind to live, we have to keep guessing about ours. We who have survived have yet a ray of hope in that we still can take a very quick turn in the right direction and be put back on the rails.

This is what we must do this very moment, for today and for tomorrow. We have a religion, i.e. the Dhamma to guide us. Turn to the Dhamma immediately. This is no time for prayer or *pūjā*, for *pūjā* of any sort. Are you quite sure that your *pūjā* is nothing more than your paying respect to the Buddha, dhamma and the Saṅgha? There is none other, besides you, to pray to or go to. *Attā hi attano*

*nātho*. You are your own guide, and your own support for this life and the other. It is time for each one of us to act. *Uttiṭṭhe nappamajjeyya. Dhammaṃ sucaritam care* says the Dhammapada [Dhp. v. 168]. It precisely means 'Rise up and prepare for action. Waste not a moment of time. Be perfectly righteous in your behavior.'

But peep into your own copies of the Dhammapada, one or many, in Sinhala translation in your home, if you have one by any chance. Make sure whether you are meaningfully enlightened by what you read in the translation of this verse no. 168. in contrast to what I have given above. Does it give you a relevant message of day to day applicability? This is the time for you to test and check on the message of Buddhism you get these days from diverse sources, from media of many sorts - the radio and the television. I would thank you for a feed back to 2689388. It is not a day too early for you to check on your knowledge of the Dhamma.

Time has come now. In the midst of this devastation, take a look around. Thousands upon thousands have died in this disaster. They have left us and gone their way. It is not for us to sit here in judgement upon them, The way they have lived their lives gives the judgement. Forget not those simple words in our scriptures *yathā'bhatam* which means 'As one has gathered, so shall he be led to his next life ': *evam nikkhitto*. All of us who have to die one day have only one thing to remember. That simply is 'A life of evil lived spells disaster.' With no intervention whatsoever. This is the basic lesson which any one anywhere in the world has to learn from this dreadful calamity, no matter to whom one addresses one's prayers.

We as Buddhists deem it abominable for any human to raise his hand against another in our own brotherhood in the world we live, in order to serve the cause of any super-human elsewhere. Who wants us to do so? In the name of justice, human or divine, he shall have to pay for it, some day, some where, in some form. This is the sound philosophy of *kamma* in Buddhism. That no man

shall ever achieve his termination of suffering in Nirvana [i.e. *dukkhassa-ntakiriyam*], without purging himself [*appaṭisaṃviditvā*] of the guilt of willed evil action [... *sañcetanikānaṃ kammānaṃ katānaṃ upacitānaṃ appaṭisaṃviditvā dukkhassantakiriyam vadāmi*. AN. V. 292].

In our opinion, this being the true position of Buddhist thinking in a post-disaster situation like the present, the time has really come for every one of us for **self-confession** and **self-correction** and thereby to work for **self-redemption**. This, we believe, is what is implied in the word *paṭisaṃvedeti* or 'purging oneself' in the teachings of the Buddha. This should be true for everybody. But this kind of thinking has relevance only in a world where people pay heed to moral values or wholesomeness in human relationships. It would otherwise be water on a duck's back.

This is why we stress the need for self-confession at a time like this. Take in hand the yardstick of *sabba-pāpassa akaraṇaṇaṃ*. That is non-commitment of all that comes in the category of evil. Have we been able to live up to this injunction? *Pāpa* is nothing but the **operation of unwholesomeness in human behavior**. This is also the territory of *pañca-sīla* in Buddhism. Buddhist or non-Buddhist, one's best **meditation** or *bhāvanā* today should be to check on one's conformity to the injunctions of the *pañca-sīla* and see whether one is **within the territory of wholesome human behavior**. This is where we intend **self-correction** to operate. Then **self-redemption** will invariably follow, possibly in this very life [*ditthe 'va dhamme*] as our texts say.

Self-righteousness seem to be the main concern of religions today. They seem now to tend more to justify than to correct these selfish egoistic deflections. There is obvious disrespect for life, both human and animal within the territory religions. This is in spite of the Fundamental Human Rights which are applicable and enforceable at global level. There is disrespect for the legitimate ownership of others, both private and public, such as terrorist demands within states for division of land. This obviously a global malaise.

This is why we feel that the time has come for severe impersonal elemental chastisement to drive home these points better. It appears, as it were, Nature has taken over where Religions have failed. Reality of nature is well above partisan loyalties of religion. Its credibility and acceptability therefore ranks much higher than religious dogmatism. Time has come for Nature to prove to man, beyond doubt, the law of impermanence or *anitya*, and the consequent fact of grief and lamentation or *dukkha* that comes in its wake. In such situations of utter helplessness, the absence of a Self or Soul or the truth of *anatta* is equally well proved.

In a power-crazy world where people like to gather themselves together under a label like religion, ethnicity or political ideology to assert and utilize their strength, all the time against others, they tend to lose sight of or totally ignore moral values or man-to-man relationships. Globally, during the last fifty years, i.e. after the World War II, we have seen enough of this wild human behavior. People often have sought from many quarters they choose, justification for this behavior of theirs.

The world over, humans need a complete revision of their man-to-man relationships. It is now becoming convincingly evident that salvation of man lies in his own self-correction. The concept of self-supremacy of so-called world religions with their inborn divisive policies of rejecting and eliminating every other, is obviously leading us to a holocaust of much more devastating magnitude than we have ever faced in the world before.



## **Penalty or Punishment / Who Punishes Whom?**

**A post-disaster survey with a Buddhist religio-cultural outlook**



*Professor Dhammavihari Thera*

We have already written and spoken about the disastrous misbehavior of nature in the tsunami incident. Humans have wept and they shall continue to weep. As to what the heavens do, we shall not comment. And about the correctness or otherwise of what has taken place, diverse forms of defense are being submitted from many quarters. Their acceptance or rejection simply depends on two English words, credibility [of what is being said] and credulousness [of those on whose ears they fall]. It is comforting to know that at least in some parts of the civilized world, the laws of the land protect children from the brutal assaults of parents.

The extent of damage to life and property in this situation is being continually assessed globally. The dead, none of them at all, cannot be brought back to life. It is also being repeatedly stated, and that in terms of one's inherited beliefs, that those who have been made to perish in this disaster are unquestionably punished for crimes they have committed against some form of authority. The world is large, we maintain, and creeds of the world are diverse. Let each find his solace from wherever it could be easily obtained.

And now for restoration of order in a post-disaster world. Here we wish to speak specifically about Sri Lanka, no more and no less. Loss of life here is believed to be in the very high region of nearly 50,000. Widely distributed damage to property is inestimable. Rehabilitation of the terror-stricken survivors who had lived on the coastal fringe is going to be more than problematic. They all have to be attended to.

It is known to every one that very generous assistance is coming to us in a big way from every corner of the earth. But it has to be remembered by all donors, both great and small, and whatever be their identity, that this is not a venture to build something out of nothing. It certainly cannot be like building something anew on barren desert sand. Up to the time of the tsunami disaster,

Sri Lankans have had a variegated past, with many items and areas of traditional culture. They have been inherited from generation to generation. These cannot be swept away by a tidal wave, no matter from where it comes or, even vaguely guessed, under whose direction. People cannot be torn apart from their moorings. In times of a crisis like this, when people have to be re-established, this is a vital principle to be remembered. It is even more important that the appointed or self-appointed nominees who receive such generous aid do adequately visualize their restoration plans and respect this principle. What pleases personally the eye and the ear of the planners, local or imported, this alone is not what matters.

All aid flowing into the country at the moment has to be a sincere attempt to assist in the restoration of a culture and a life style of a people with a datable history going back more than two thousand years. In the name of Heaven, it shall not be fishing in troubled waters. Nor should it provide a green-house nursery for sowing wild oats of subtle expansionist manouvering. In this little island of Sri Lanka, from north to south as well as from east to west, the culture and civilization of Buddhism, brought hither more than two millennia go, had left megalithic monuments to last much longer than even the recently devastated giant Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan.

History is more than adequately proving that man, in his ethno-religious fanaticism and fury has been, always and everywhere, a more devilish architect of destruction, than the wildness of nature. Infuriated humans are seen to be globally determined to exterminate the culture of every other group which is imagined and identified during moments of insanity, to be their rival. In Sri Lanka today, there is adequate proof of this. It is no exaggeration if we report that in our own country, this kind of vandalism and brutality continues to be done everyday, under the very nose of people who are pledged to protect them. It is time now for the rulers and the ruled in this country to awaken to this situation. Exquisite sculptures in stone, massive architectural masterpieces like the brazen palace

and monumental trees like the Bodhi which have a justifiable right to survive through time, have given way under these ruthless assaults of man. For a nation, with a legitimate pride of its past, this is obliteration enough. A revolt against this has to come, sooner or later.

Now in the wake of this tragic disaster which in a way is global and with an equally global sensitivity and concern to restore peace and prosperity, it makes absolutely good sense to scrutinize the sanity with which we humans are living in this world. We are attempting to teach lessons to others about terrorists and aggression while there is a great need for each one of us to learn a little more. We shall here focus attention more on our Sri Lankan scene.

It is also true that this disaster has come about at a time while a post-independence Sri Lanka is being put in a melting pot by generation after generation of bungling political leadership for the preparation of a witches' brew. And nobody knows, to serve whom. For they know not what they do. In the hands of global mediators who are made not to know anything about our past by the very people who engage them and who themselves equally know very little, nothing less than devastation and disaster can be expected. For several decades now Sri Lanka has witnessed a politically generated ethno-religious conflict which has been meaninglessly exaggerated globally by numerous interested groups, both from within and outside. It was more than stupid for somebody somewhere to have said 'that the government in Sri Lanka is waging a war against Hindu separatists.' There is no gainsaying that too much of international politics also has seeped into the Sri Lankan problem.

On the other hand, it is also equally true that there are many saner and wiser men and women in both these ethnic groups in Sri Lanka who know and believe in the possibility of peaceful co-existence in this heaven-blessed island. They have seen it happen. Some of us are old enough, well past our eighties, to tell you what a post-World-War II Sri Lanka was like. Few know about it today. But those who wish to know, are indeed very much less. What respect we had then for

humans, as men and women with wisdom, glistening with human virtues which were very nearly divine. Believe me. In Sri Lanka, they came from all ethnic groups of the time. Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay, Borah and Sinhala. Also among them were Hindus, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Buddhists and followers of the Islamic faith. I can name them for you, one by one.

For a peaceful settlement of this self-annihilating conflict in Sri Lanka, dignified detachment at every level of thinking and acting is a primary prerequisite. Honesty and trustworthiness have to be part and parcel of every pursuit of a peaceful solution to this problem, no matter from which part of the world these mediators are seen surfacing from time to time. Larger or smaller groups, local or foreign, with excessive and aggressive greed, who are politically motivated on any side to further their expansionist policies, have to be rooted out and exiled for all times.

An honest scrutiny of Sri Lankan history would clearly indicate how the major community in the island, i.e. the Sinhala Buddhists who constitute nearly 70 % of the island's population have very peacefully assimilated and accumulated over the centuries, nay millennia, a great deal of Hindu religion and culture into their own. Who in this country, tell me, accommodates a Skanda, a ferocious God of War, with weapons of mass destruction in his hands, within their pantheon, even offering him the option to aspire for Buddhahood one day. They even concede to him the title Future Buddha: Matu Buduvana Kanda Kumaru. It is the Sri Lankan Buddhists who have done so. Can the United Nations ever initiate such a move? Will they ever do? Japanese Buddhists did identically the same in accommodating Hachiman, the Shinto God of War as a Bodhisattva under the name Hachiman Pusa.

One final consideration with regard to the rebuilding of the devastated areas of Sri Lanka. Most of the damaged areas are known to have been semi-urban and rural. In a hasty program of re-building one must not make the mistake of over-urbanizing these settlements. The village community life pattern must be

restored. Hastily constructed condominiums to settle displaced victims of the tsunami disaster would, very naturally work in the opposite direction. Social elitism, in any case, must have its roots in the village. The village is by no means rustic. rustic in the sense of wild, crude and violent like their urban counter part. It is in the peaceful and friendly rural setting of the village that man lives closest to nature, in proximity with bird and beast.

This is where man can learn most of his lessons about life. Close to such settlements, urban as well as rural, and scattered among them, there should be provision for miniature tracts of man-grown forests [which during the Buddha's time in India were called *ropita-vana* or planted forests] for the accommodation of birds and animals. We must not forget that we must provide adequate accommodation for the migratory birds who visit us seasonally.

We have been through such beautiful spots in European countries where they are referred to as *bois* and *foret*, both words meaning forests in miniature, e.g. Bois de Boulogne in the vicinity of Paris. Then and only then can there be the growth of a healthy human community, with a delightful sense of love, share and care for the men, women and children, for the young and the old, reckoning at the same time with the entire biota and the ecosystems.

It is equally important for our wise policy-makers to remember the need to conserve the community life of the village. The brutal hand of man, assisted by the reckless and unimaginative policies of those who rule the land, at all levels, has very nearly contributed to the total extinction of fauna and flora in the island. Think of the total destruction of the forest cover of the land, not only to serve the needs of those who require timber to build houses, but also to serve those who need to earn more money by unethical means like the rape of the forests to live on the lap of luxury. Forget not the name Sinharaja Forest Region. Everybody knows the geo-physical disasters which this kind of mishandling of nature brings about. Do we need the vengeance of heaven to arrest these. Buddhist teachings appeal to the sanity of humans not to tear off even a branch of the tree under the

shadow of which he once took shelter. It is wild and treacherous.

*Yassa rukkhassa chāyāya nisīdeyya sayeyya vā  
na tassa sākhā bhañjeyya mittadubbho hi pāpako.*

In the wake of this disaster which all of us have painfully suffered, now let us endeavor to retrieve the wealth of fauna and flora which we have lost over the decades through our recklessness, vanity and our ignorance. It may be one or it may be all these failings put together. It is our genuine wish and our hopeful vision to see once again this delightful tropical island of ours charmingly dotted with clusters of villages, at every thirty or forty kilometers distance where bamboos of yellow and green would sprout with ease, with abundance of mango and jambu growing near by. These village colonies would promote the rearing of dairy cattle in the proximity of the home and a few buffaloes in the fields further away. There would be continuous supply of milk, curd and ghee for consumption and sale. Growing of vegetables with the assistance of all home-folk, aided by the dung provided by the farm animals would turn out to be a flourishing source of income for these village communities. In between should come the model towns and marketing centers. The village and the town together shall be the supplier and the consumer. Pollution and crime should be at its lowest. Men, women and children in such a peaceful set up will very naturally have the courage to completely shut out drugs and alcohol from their neighborhood and keep crime completely off the scene.

Life in such rural settings would be so restful and relaxed. Contentment would be the hall-mark of their life style. Juvenile delinquency would be unheard of.



## Life of the Human and its Dimensions

*Professor Bhikkhu Dhammavihari Thera*

I would commence my sermon to you today with the scriptural statement from the Rohitassa vagga of the Anguttara Nikaya [at AN. II. 48] where the Master himself is seen to be saying `within this fathom-sized human body [i.e. *byāmamatte kalebare*], I place the world' [*lokañ ca paññāpemi ...*]. It is a wonderfully rich, pregnant statement. It is going to place us in a correct perspective as to who we are and indicate to us our rightful and legitimate place in the world we live in. Are we humans no more than mere products of a mass-producing factory located elsewhere? Who and what are we? Are we to believe that we are helpless creatures in the hands of an affluent industrialist who has set up the factory and is in a position to dispose of the goods as he likes? Wisdom of the world today is beginning to look upon humans as being quite a bit more than that.

This little dhamma statement which is now in our hands speaks not only of the presence of the world or loka within ourselves, literally within the human body, with its conscious activity [i.e. *saññimhi samanake*], but also its very genesis or samudaya and its cessation or nirodha within it. It is further added that, equally well, the very path or way leading to this cessation or nirodhagāminī paṭipadā exists within it. When we look at the world today as it is, with sanity and a clearer vision, and see man's ghastly behavior towards one another, many of us would have to agree that this is not the best place for us to be in. That is why we as Buddhists make bold to speak of a way leading out of it or nissaraṇa. This nissaraṇa culminates in the complete cessation of the ceaselessly painful process of being born and dying within it. Buddhism indeed makes a very candid cameo of this [*Kiccham vatā 'yam loko āpanno jāyati ca jīyati ca mīyati ca cavati ca uppajjati ca. SN. II.10*].

Here is the Buddha's statement in full for your benefit. This I present to you

as an absolute safeguard we wish to build within our listeners so that they may not be easily misled by careless preachers of the dhamma today who rattle off unsupported statements about many things in life as Buddha-vacana.

*Api cā 'haṃ āvuso imasmiṃ yeva byāmamatte kalebare saññimhi samanake lokañ ca paññāpemi lokasamudayañ ca lokanirodhañ ca lokanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadan 'ti. AN.II.48.*

Now as for the concept of the world. It would be a very correct assumption for us Buddhists that a real physical world does exist outside us. The world is by no means a mental creation [or māyā] of man. We humans who exist within it are also physical realities. To us Buddhists, the word real does not apply to anything which exists beyond the human plane. Nothing called real exists in a different super human plane, outside or beyond man. To us, it is something which comes within our sensory experience which is existentially real.

So to us Buddhists, what is said to exist within us under the name loka is what really matters. It is a reconstructed version of the world that really exists outside of us, but reconstructed by us in terms of our experience and our reactions. It is our pattern of self-reconstruction, in the way we want it, unmindful of its real nature, that brings in its wake, all that is called dukkha. The blue print of our construction or reconstruction plan is primarily based on our human failings of being attracted to [lobha] or repelled by [dosa]. This is exactly how Paṭācārā understood the Buddhist explanation of her grief over the loss of her infant child: *taṃ kuto āgataṃ puttam mama putto'ti rodasi* [Thig. v. 127]. Mind you. This is Paṭācārā in my version and not yours. Read the Therīgāthā text your self today, I insist, and discover the identity of Paṭācārā if you like. Our Buddhist texts refer to this psychic process of attraction and repulsion as *anurodha-virodham āpanno* at MN. I. 266.

Let us now turn to and examine the world view of the Buddhists. Buddhism's main theme is that everything within the realm of saṃsāric existence [i.e. this



side of Nirvana] is subject to the law of change or anitya [Pali anicca]. They are all conditioned things or saṅkhāra. Hence the dhamma *statement sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*. The glory of Nirvana is that it stands completely beyond conditioned things of the world. It is unconditioned or asaṅkhatam. That is why Nirvana is described as a place which is not under the sway of the Four Great Elements or the mahābhūtas [*Ettha āpo ca paṭhavi ca tejo vāyo na gāḍhati* in the Kevaḍḍa Sutta at DN. I. 223]. This is what we would uphold as the transcendence or the lokuttara excellence of Nirvana.

This position, we understand only with developed vision or wisdom: *yadā paññāya passati*. Hence our vision of the world, external or internal, has to be that it is something which is subject to change, and hence leading to dukkha [yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ]. With such a view of the world, when one has personally acquired it, one does not come to grief. That is the total immunity of the enlightened and emancipated one. Being already fore-warned, one is totally prepared for these changes in the world. We shall elaborate on this in due course.

Taking a look at the man of the world, as he passes from birth to death, we reckon with his psycho-physical existence as consisting of a physical body which goes under the name of *rūpa* [this being the first item in the grouping called the Five Aggregates or *pañcakkhandha*] which in turn is activated and set in motion by its **complementary psychic component** consisting of **four different layers of cognitive activity**. They are *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*. These are collectively called ***nāma***. This is probably why this total collection of *pañcakkhandha*, when it constitutes a living human being is referred as *nāma + rūpa*. The word *nāmarūpa* is at times singly used to refer to the human personality [*Sabbaso nāmarūpasmim yassa natthi mamāyitaṃ* at Sn. v. 950 and *Sabbaso nāmarūpasmim vītagedhassa Brāhmaṇa* at Sn. v. 1100].

We have already referred above to the very fundamental Buddhist attitude of anitya or ceaseless change with regard to oneself or things of the world [sabbe

saṅkhārā aniccā 'ti]. It is not that Buddhism expects or compels us to believe it. The nature of the world being unalterably what it is, our resistance and non-acceptance of this way of nature or the challenge of it brings us into conflict with it. This, essentially is the genesis of dukkha. It is because of this inability or unwillingness of ours to sensibly accommodate within our thinking this inexorable way of nature, that we say that dukkha is self-generated from within ourselves. It is not a thing that exists in the world by itself.

If the humans can be made to sense this presence of dukkha in the world, and can be made to discern the cause of its origin, we would indeed be happy that the message of Buddhism has reached them. The ability to sense the presence of dukkha in life, i.e. in the very process of living [or *pariññeyyaṃ*], is the very first requirement in Buddhist culture or religious training. The Bodhisatta himself had to go through this phase, as he himself says, as the Buddha, in the Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta [*pariññeyyan'ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi and pariññātan' ti me bhikkhave ...*]. Dukkha has to be known and identified within our own living world of experience, in this world, within ourselves.

We have already explained above that we humans suffer dukkha due to our own maladjustment to situations we are driven to in life like deaths and disasters, defeats and disappointments. We are not adequately insulated against the sharp cutting edges of the world like loss, decline, insult and injury with our own awareness of impermanence and change with regard to oneself and the world. With an erring sense of selfhood, built around a grossly mistaken notion of I, a disturbing sense of loss and gain, victory and defeat, fame and shame all invariably follow the man who entertains the notion of self.

How and where shall we begin to correct our position in life? We have to begin with a corrected vision about ourselves. This has to be the commencement of our Buddhistness, to each one of us severally, one by one. Father and son, mother and daughter, each one by himself and by herself. There can be no mass

conversions into a religious faith. Not for us Buddhists. The dhamma or truths of Buddhism are to be known and realized by each one for himself and herself. About the dhamma, have we not said this an infinite number of times in our lives? Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo ... paccattam veditabbo viññūhī ' ti. By each wise man, the Buddha's dhamma is to be known by himself.

We Buddhists, at least those in Sri Lanka who wish to retain their worthy identity as Theravādins, have one and only one way to their salvation in Nirvana. It is all the time a practical way of living the dhamma in their day to day life. There are no short cuts via imported secret meditations or chanting methods to be carried on secretly in closed apartments, no matter imported from where and sponsored by our own natives or immigrants mysteriously present in our midst.

Have we Sri Lankans sunk to such low depths of poverty, intellectual poverty as well as poverty in cash and kind, to be lured into any offer from any where? The wide prevalence of such practices in the city which are cheap, but mysteriously glamorous to many people around, is not unknown to us. This is not very different from the unsuspected sub-standard food market in the city where any attractively packaged anything which is widely advertised is good enough for eating.

All Buddhists need to be correctly informed about the basic truths of their religion long before their young children are arrogantly taught Abhidhamma in the dhamma schools. Dhamma which must gain precedence over everything else necessarily provides this knowledge. This is what is meant when the texts say that the good life begins with sammā diṭṭhi or corrected vision [*Tattha bhikkhave sammā-diṭṭhi pubbaṅgamā hoti.* MN. III.76]. This is the entry point into the good Dhamma. This sammā-diṭṭhi or corrected vision comes via information of the dhamma through reliable sources or parato ghoṣo. This is down to earth and not divine revelation. Having heard the dhamma, each individual has to play the expected role of diligent analysis and examination of what he has heard [yoniso ca manasikāro].

Every Buddhist must know the perimeter of his religious creed. He cannot keep guessing about life after death, about saṃsāra and Nirvana. He must not look out for laboratory proof for basic religious concepts like rebirth. He must determine the dimensions of his religious life, the validity of his ethics, the significance of his religious culture in *sīla samādhi paññā*, the worth and bliss of Nirvana.

Deriving out of all these, a Buddhist must come to possess his finest tool in the concept of tilakkhaṇa, i.e. anicca dukkha anatta. In his life in the world, as monk or layman, he should do all the necessary calibrating with this fine tool of tilakkhaṇa. Then, events in the life of man, which are only a reflected expression of what happens in the world will not, at any time, paralyze him with unsuspected shocks and grief. It is only when one makes an error in assessing one's assets and achievements in life, as when one boasts about the possession of sons and wealth, saying *puttā m' atthi dhanam atthi*, that one forthwith comes to grief: *iti bālo vihaññati*.

This is how one then comes to handle the world, the world in its totality which exists outside, including one's sons and one's wealth, within oneself. Taking it in hand, and personalizing it, one sensibly uses the correct yardstick of tilakkhana, and instructs oneself to see what is anicca as anicca and not to grieve over what is no more than the natural order of change. One personalizes the situation by strictly reminding oneself that one has no command even over oneself: *attā hi attano natthi*. Within oneself, one shall thus terminate the origin of dukkha, by one's own self-corrected attitude to the world.

As the Suttanipāta puts it, when one claims no ownership even over oneself [*sabbaso nāmarūpasmim yassa natthi mamāyitaṃ* - Sn. v. 950], then one has no need then to grieve over anything because nothing does really exist in the Buddhist concept of the world [*asatā ca na socati*. loc.cit.]. This should provide a lovely solace to the man of the world, that armed with a fool-proof attitude to the world we live, humans should be able to reduce the shocks and tremors we get

in our mundane world because of man's chasing all the time after possessions, positions and power.

In another place in the Suttanipāta [at Sn. v.1100], this same human weakness of running into conflict and consequent pain because of our erratic thinking and our malformed attitudes is highlighted. This latter of faulty thinking and the degeneracy which follows man is said to amass defiling traits of character which are referred to as āsava. These āsava contribute to the prolongation of man's Saṃsāric continuance [*yehi maccu-vasaṃ vaje. loc. cit.*]. He who has no attachment [vītagedha] to this misconstrued sense of I [*mamāyitaṃ*] is the one who is totally freed of āsava [*āsavā 'ssa na vijjanti. loc. cit.*].

In the absence of any such greed [vītagedha] in terms of I and mine, one does not come to possess any defiling traits or āsava on account of which one gets further tied up with a life after death [*yehi maccu-vasaṃ vaje Sn. v.1100*]. This assures the termination of Saṃsāric journeying. Are you quite sure you would not like to travel a little more? Believe me. At the end of the journey is this bliss of Nirvana.



## ***Bhāvanā* - The Culture and Development in Buddhism**

### **Undertaken for the sake of Nirvana**

*Professor Bhikkhu Dhammavihari Thera*

The subject of my sermon for you today is essentially a study of the concept of ***bhāvanā*** in Buddhism. In Pali, that is in the language in which the early Buddhist teachings are preserved, the word ***bhāvanā*** means development,

culture and growth of the human.

It is a multiple culture, a growth of body and mind, i.e. *kāya* and *citta*. Let me remind you at the very outset that, as far as Buddhism is concerned, meditation, or meditating on, is only a segmented, partial meaning for the word *bhāvanā*. Listen to this side of the story as well. This growth process is said to include even the culture of one's wisdom [*Tisso bhāvanā* | *kāya-bhāvanā citta-bhāvanā paññā-bhāvanā* as at DN. III .219 in the Saṅgīti Sutta]. Thus *bhāvanā* in Buddhism is a culture or development to be undertaken and stimulated by humans, by men, women and children, for the specific purpose of their liberation in Nirvana.

This division of the human being in terms of body and mind, as envisaged above, appears to be a very down to earth one. But try to see its meaningful, sound philosophical implications. By the time the Buddhist spiritual aspirant gets to the fourth *jhāna*, he is said to get a deeper insight into this two fold division of his own self. He sees this physical body [*ayaṃ kho me kāyo rūpī* as in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta at DN. I. 76] which is of parental origin as consisting of the four great elements [*cātummahābhūtikō mātā-ṭṭikasambhavo* - loc.cit.].

He also sees the psychic component of the human which he precisely labels as *viññāṇa*, lying embedded within it [... *idañ ca pana me viññāṇaṃ ettha sitaṃ ettha paṭibaddhaṃ* 'ti. loc.cit.]. It is of paramount importance for our Buddhists not to ignore, and I repeat **not to ignore**, the identity of this *viññāṇa*. Not to know its trans-*saṃsāric* dimensions, and what vital part it plays in our day to day life with regard to our future, here and hereafter. We shall come back to it in due course.

In common parlance, this unified combination of body and mind, this psycho-physical entity of *kāya* and *citta* of the human, is also referred to as *nāma-rūpa*. It is to be viewed as a unit with a totality of its own. It is for the sake of being watchful of its behavior as a totality and our attitude towards it, than as an attempt on our part to split it. This appears to us to be what is more vital. Even the earliest Buddhist texts like the Suttanipāta, in its Aṭṭhaka and Pārāyana

Vaggas, are seen referring to the human personality as *nāma-rūpa* from this angle. Note this usage in the Aṭṭhakavagga as *Sabbaso nāmarūpasmiṃ yassa natthi mamāyitaṃ* at Sn. v. 950. It just means 'With regard to this human personality, if one can be without making any personal claims as I and mine.' Note also the argument that follows. 'Then one shall never have the occasion to grieve in terms of what one has lost or what exists no more in one's possession' [*asatā ca na socati*. loc. cit.]. This is followed by the idea that one shall also not 'be overcome or defeated by another' [*sa ve loke na jiyati*. loc. cit.]. This indeed is an infallible formula offered by Buddhism for sustained comfort in life. Or more assuredly **for absence of discomfort and distress**. This, I tell you, is one of the loveliest bits of dhamma instructions one can ever set eyes upon.

The Suttanipāta gives us another reference to this same use of *nāma-rūpa* to denote the psycho-physical entity called the human. This time, it is from the Pārāyana Vagga. *Sabbaso nāmarūpasmiṃ vītagedhassa brāhmaṇa* [Sn. v. 1100]. *Nāmarūpa* in both these contexts mean no more and no less than the man of the world. The message here is with regard to the total elimination of every form of greed [*gedhā*] relating to oneself, in terms of I and mine. It is implied here that such greed builds up defiling traits of character or *āsava* which are *samsāra*-prolonging, or plunging one into the realm of birth and death [*maccu-vasaṃ vaje*.].

The insistence in both these cases is on the way the Buddhist, as a being of the world, must look upon himself. Its unmistakable thrust is on ego-reduction, i.e. on the need to entertain **no notions of selfhood of I and mine**, individually or collectively, i.e. either of one's self or what belongs to it as identifiably permanent, enduring and lasting. It must become clear to any sensible man of the world, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, that this attitudinal correction alone will save him from suffering severe stresses and strains in situations of victory and defeat, loss and gain, praise and blame, fame and shame etc. which are today's deadly venomous areas, whether they be generated through ethnic arrogance, religious

fanaticism or notions of political supremacy, into which the world, east or west, is plunging itself all the time. Do we not witness it every moment around us? When will wisdom come into the heads of those who generate such crisis situations?

There is yet another dimension of human life about which it is vital for the Buddhist to be aware of. It is the **pre-natal stage of our life**. We accept human life to be self-generated and self-evolving. Therefore it is seen to stretch through time and space, with a definite past and a possible future. There is no need to endeavor to know when it began or in whose hands. Buddhists are confidently aware of the man-made, i.e. parental [*mātā-pettika-sambhavo*] pre-natal phase of human life in the mother's womb. This fetal stage of human life known as the zygote, the Buddhists regard as the life potential, not yet blown to the state of full-fledged human life. It is on the way to being one. Beware. Therefore it is not to be tampered with.

In its search for a perch wherein it can commence its growth process, it may accidentally settle in the Fallopian tube which would destine a calamitous end for a possible human life. On the other hand, wherever the fetal body is to get implanted, in the mother's womb [or in the Fallopian tube] for the commencement of the growth process, Buddhist thinking requires that the Saṃsāric psychic-component of human life called the *viññāṇa* must get compounded with its physical complement, namely the parental physical contribution.

The whole of this parental contribution now lying within the mother is also called *nāma-rūpa* as against the incoming psychic component *viññāṇa*. If this wedlock of the *nāma-rūpa*, with its co-partner *viññāṇa*, does not take place within the mother, Buddhist thinking is firm in its assertion that no growth of human life will commence. See it for yourself in the Mahānidāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. [*Viññāṇaṃ vā hi Ānanda mātukucchiṃ na okkamissatha api nu kho nāma-rūpaṃ mātu kucchismiṃ samucchissathā 'ti. No h'etaṃ bhante. DN. II.63*].

Here is one of the most vital points of Buddhist doctrine one has to



remember. That is the **Saṃsāric continuity of human life** and how it happens. Whichever way scholars of Buddhism, east or west, interpret the doctrine of Paṭiccasamuppāda, we are of the opinion that it explains the continuance of human life through Saṃsāra, i.e. through an unbroken series of births and deaths, through time and space, showing links both to the past and the future.

The Mahānidāna Sutta which we have already quoted above speaks of the arrival of *viññāṇa* in the mother's womb [*mātu kucchi*, perhaps not forgetting the possibility of a Fallopian tube conception], to fertilize as it were, the fetal body or *nāma-rūpa*. Buddhist suttas refer to the existence of such a personalized *saṃsāric* individual consciousness for each one of us which traverses ceaselessly through time and space. I quote it for you here from the Saṃpasādaniya Sutta for your precise information ... *purisassa ca viññāṇa-sotaṃ pajānāti ubhayato abbochinnaṃ idhaloke patiṭṭhitaṃ paraloke patiṭṭhitaṃ ca*. [DN. III.105 Saṃpasādaniya Sutta]. Here you get a very definite idea about its flow through time.

Now we have another quote from the Majjhima Nikāya, indicating its movement through space ... *Kāyassa bhedaṃ parammaraṇā thānaṃ etaṃ vijjati yaṃ taṃ samvattanikaṃ viññāṇaṃ assa āṇanjūpagam*. [MN. II.262 Āṇājasappāya Sutta].

This Saṃsāric *viññāṇa* is to be viewed only as a source of regenerative power which is conditionally generated [*paṭicca-samuppannaṃ*]. One must be cautioned here not to slip into the error in which Sāti found himself, imagining that this *viññāṇa* is an unchanging entity, journeying with the self same identity [*tad' ev' idaṃ viññāṇaṃ sandhāvati saṃsarati anaññan 'ti*: Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta at MN. I.256]. It is such a vision we presented to you above from the Saṃpasādaniya Sutta where some one endowed with special power sees another's *samvattanika-viññāṇa* [i.e. rebirth generative psychic potential], operating between two life phases referred to as this life here and the life beyond death [*idhaloke patiṭṭhitaṃ paraloke patiṭṭhitaṃ*].

The possibility of this process of rolling on from death here to a birth again elsewhere, and continuing the same *ad infinitum*, the Buddhists must remember, is what our Buddhist texts refer to as ***bhava*** or existence in Saṃsāra. This *process* is fed and nurtured by our own grasping at life or ***upādāna***. It will continue unabated until each one of us, out of our own choice, work out for its termination through non-grasping or non-grabbing [*anupādā parinibbānattham*]. Herein lies the salvation of the Buddhist where all unhappiness is said to be ended.

Buddhism thus seems to subscribe to the view that the physical contribution of parents towards child production would hardly be of any value unless there would come on the scene a life-seeker or *gandhabba* [we suspect here its equivalence to the word ***gantabba*** which we would translate as ***saṃsāra-goer***?] looking out for conception in a human mother [See Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta at MN.I. 265f.]. It is after this inter-dependent or reciprocal combination of *viññāṇa* and *nāma-rūpa* that the growth process of human life really begins.

In a passage recorded in the Saṃyutta Nikāya at SN.II. 114, Venerable Sariputta clarifies this inter-dependence to Venerable Mahākoṭṭhita as follows: ... *evaṃ eva kho āvuso nāma-rūpapaccayā viññāṇam viññāṇapaccayā nāma-rūpam / nāma-rūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṃ saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso*. Once *nāma-rūpa* is firmly coupled with *viññāṇa*, sense organs appear thereafter [*nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ*], signaling the commencement of their functioning. An unborn child in the mother's womb is said to be able to hear and record sounds of the external world by about the twentieth week.

All that we have said so far about the genesis of human life, i.e. as to how we come to be born into this world and continue our living process here is for the purpose of correctly placing the human in this worldly setting and pointing out to him clearly the phenomenon of *saṃsāric* continuance and release therefrom. Remember that every Buddhist has to begin his religious life with an awareness that every one of us steps into this world with a precisely weighed and recorded

*karmic* load on our back.

Like electricity generated through a dynamo or alternator in a motor car, the *karmic* load in our own lives is generated through our very process of living in thought, word and deed. Our being motivated via greed [*lobha*] and hatred [*dosa*], or in other words being attracted and repelled by the world through our sense faculties generates this *karmic* energy. And this, on the one hand provides fuel for *saṃsāric* cruising and on the other determines the quality of life which we inherit in the process to be blissful or painful. Remember verses 1 & 2 of the Dhammapada which speaks of *manasā ce paduṭṭhena* and *manasā ce pasannena* leading to *dukkhaṃ* and *sukhaṃ* respectively. This *karmic* load has its own impact on the doer of action as *vipāka* or fruition at three stages as

1. this life itself [*diṭṭhe'va dhamme*], or
2. in the very next [*upapajje*] or
3. at any time during the *saṃsāric* journeying [*apare vā pariyāye*].

At death, we carry over to our next life, through *jāti*, whatever is the contamination of our minds as residual corruption called *āsaya* and *anusaya*. Thus the human mind has to be reckoned as being contaminated all the time, until Nirvana, on account of these **underlying defiling traits**. They are inherently there in every new born child [... *mandassa uttānaseyyakassa sakkāyo iti'pi na hoti. Kuto pan'assa uppajjissati sakkāyadiṭṭhi. Anuseti tv'ev'assa sakkāya-diṭṭhānusayo*. Mahāmālunkeyaputta Sutta at MN.I.433].

These defilements are also referred to as *kilesa*. It is in the final attainment of Nirvana through enlightenment, i.e. acquisition of *paññā* that *kilesa* are finally eradicated [*paññāya c'assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti*- MN. I. 477]. The Aṅguttara Nikāya [at AN.I.132] refers to a similar purge of the human mind which is contaminated during its *saṃsāric* journeying with egoistic defilements of I and mine [*ahaṃkāra-mamaṅkāra-mānānusayā*], both subjectively with regard to one's own self [*imasmiñca saviññāṇake kāye*] and objectively with regard to the

world which exists external to oneself [*bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu*]. This is said to be possible at the pre-*paññā* level of *samādhi* when this range of *anusaya* are said to be terminated [*ahaṃkāra-mamīṃkāra-mānānusayā nā'ssu* - AN. I. 132].

It is with this final end in view that all culture and development in Buddhism as a religion has to be undertaken. This and this alone has the right to go under the true name of *bhāvanā* in Buddhism.



## As Buddhists do We Know where We wish to Land?

*Professor Bhikkhu Dhammavihari Thera*

I commence my sermon today with the question Do we know where we wish to land? This indeed looks a typical space age question. But this should not baffle you. The Buddha as our supreme religious leader was far ahead of this today's space age of ours. Born into this world more than two and a half millennia ago, this young Siddhartha of India inherited a religious culture which knew a great deal more than a flat earth and a sun and moon above us. Time and space were clearly and visibly displayed before the Indians of the time. They already knew of the Big Bang and the Big Crunch under the names *vivaṭṭa* and *samvatta kappas*. Galaxies of infinite number called *loka dhātu* which were labelled as great, medium and small or *mahā*, *majjhimikā* and *cūlanikā* were in their reckoning.

I firmly subscribe to the view that our Bodhisatta or the Buddha aspirant had a wisdom not only of his age into which he was born, but also one which he had developed through time, during his *samsāric* journeying. It is this remarkable maturity of wisdom which enabled him to remark about the human predicament, about its ceaseless decadence from birth to death through disease and decay,

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viewing it in such a way that none of us ever set eyes upon.

